

It's 2015.

Why do our poetry E-books still suck?

The Yellow Buick Review is out now.
Pop the hood to see open-source
examples of HTML/CSS for poetry.

The
Yellow Buick
Review

Now accepting
submissions of
fake* poetry for
Issue #2!

*No, really.

**follow @ybreview or check out
yellowbuickreview.wordpress.com.**



Poem Sample

“Rumplestiltskin”

by Glyn Maxwell

Performed with kind
permission of the poet

**When poetry is
delivered as if it were
prose, you know it's
wrong.**

When poetry is
delivered as if it were
prose, it becomes
prosaic.

prosaic \prō-ˈzā-ik\



1 a: characteristic of prose as
distinguished from poetry: factual

b: dull, unimaginative

<prosaic advice>

2: everyday, ordinary

<heroic characters wasted in prosaic
lives>



“Il y a de certaines choses dont la médiocrité est insupportable—la poésie, la musique, la peinture, le discours public.”

—Jean de la Bruyère



“There are certain things
in which mediocrity is
unbearable—poetry, music,
painting, public speaking.”

—Jean de la Bruyère

Toronto Poetry Project

(view Website)

Photos by Tyson Erb





Brandon Amico

@amicob

 Follow

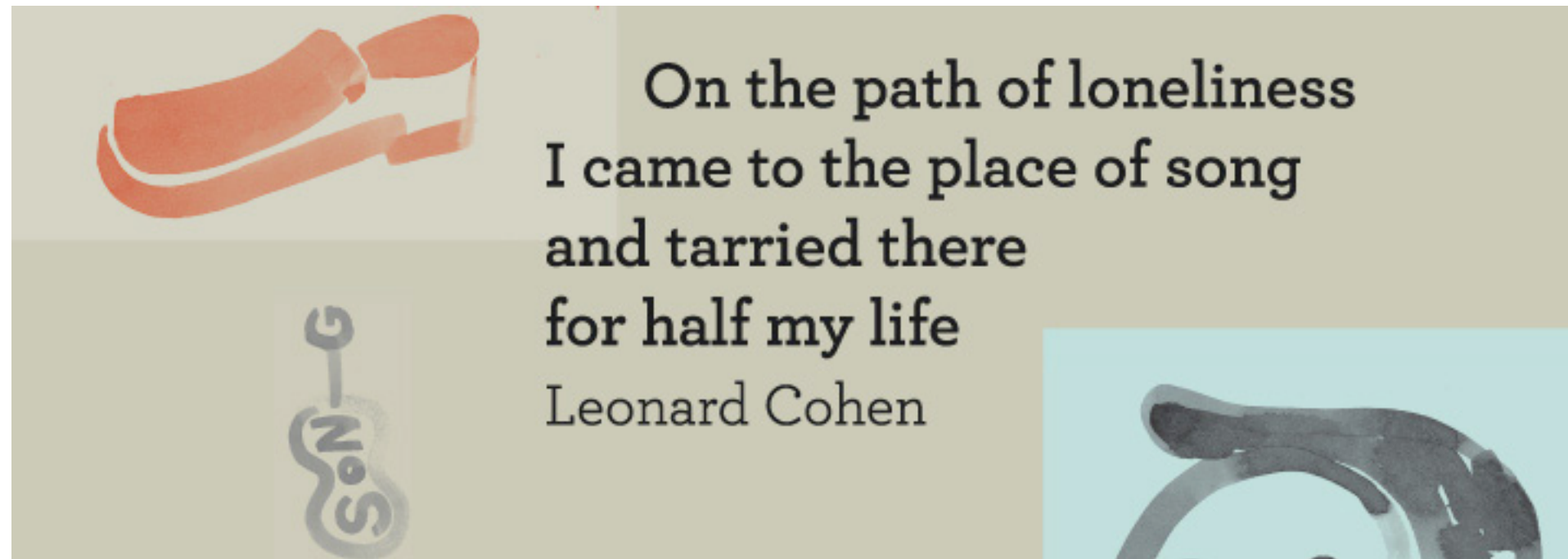
POETRY TIP: The most natural line breaks are achieved by positioning a drinking bird above Enter & typing normally pic.twitter.com/qzBD6GPkr4

5:24 PM - 25 Mar 2014

2 RETWEETS 5 FAVORITES



© Mike Hursh



On the subject of poetry and music—

Photo by Tyson Erb

The **line** is the defining unit of **poetry**, as the **measure** is the defining unit of **music**.

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The **line break** and the **indent** are two of the poet's most powerful tools to convey pace, mood, and voice to the reader.

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The **line break** and the **indent** are two of the poet's most powerful tools to convey pace, mood, and voice to the reader.

Printed poetry is sheet music for the spoken word.

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You wouldn't ask a composer to just put black dots on a page and leave the dynamics and tempo to the publisher.

You shouldn't ask a poet to just write sentences on a page and leave the line breaks and indents to the publisher.



“A poet can survive
everything but a misprint.”

–Oscar Wilde

Quo vadimus?

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(That's Latin for "Où allons-nous?")

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1. The problem with poetry E-books
2. Others' (highly unsatisfactory) solutions

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2. Others' (highly unsatisfactory) solutions
3. Our experiences at Bicycle Comics
4. Our (somewhat unsatisfactory, but hey) solutions

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- <code stuff>

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5. Why it matters and what comes next

1. The problem with poetry E-books.

(cue Safari field trip)

“This Is Not Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Howl’”

- Craig Morgan Teicher, Publisher’s Weekly

“Poetry’s Tense Relationship with e-readers”

- Lonnae O’Neal Parker, Washington Post

“Poetry Finally Joining E-book Revolution”

- Hillel Italie, Associated Press

Bill Radke: How did you find the meaning of your poetry changed on the screen?

Billy Collins: Well it wasn't so much the meaning, it was just that poetry comes in lines, like gasoline comes in gallons. If you wanted the name of the creature that is the poet, they are like *homo linearium* – they're like line-making creatures.

APM Marketplace Interview

The Yellow Buick Review

@ybreview



Radke: Haha, yes.

Collins: And that's what we do, we make lines. Charles Olson, the poet, said no line must sleep, every line in a poem should be wakeful to the lines around it. And when you put a poem on a Kindle, the lines are broken in order to fit on the screen. And so instead of being the poet's decision, it becomes the device's decision.

**2. Others' (highly
unsatisfactory)
solutions.**

(cue Safari field trip/ Kindle screens)



<http://katedavis.com/>

“How to Publish a Poetry E-book in 7 Simple Steps”

Step 7: “Contact a professional or do the formatting yourself.”

The Yellow Buick Review

@ybreview



CXXXVIII

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutor'd youth,
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;
On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.

43%

Locations 281-90

653

CXXXVII

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.
If eyes corrupt by over-partial looks
Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks
Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?
Why should my heart think that a several plot
Which my heart knows the wide world's common
place?
Or mine eyes, seeing this, say this is not,
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?
In things right true my heart and eyes have
err'd,
And to this false plague are they now
transferr'd.

41%

Locations 273-81

653

Picador
(MacMillan)
has some
good CSS,
but it's
proprietary.



Note to the Reader

Copper Canyon Press encourages you to calibrate your settings by using the line of characters below, which optimizes the line length and character size:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.
Pellentesque

Aa Aa Aa Aa Aa Aa Aa Aa

Words per Line fewest fewer default

Text-to-Speech turn on

Speech Rate slower default faster

Speaking Voice female male

The much- anticipated, \$50K solution:



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The much-
anticipated,
\$50K solution:
Use really tiny font sizes.

Is FXL the solution?

Is FXL the solution?

Over my `</body>`.

3. Our experiences at Bicycle Comics

Quick Terms:

Anthology: Different poets in one book

Stanza: A grouped collection of lines

Alight (2013)

- Very, very crude version of CSS
- Still better than 90% of peers
- Formatting as a feature
- Started building bookmarks:
Liz Castro, Liza Daly, Joshua Tallent



Product Details

File Size: 179 KB

Print Length: 82 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publisher: Bicycle Comics; 1 edition (August 10, 2013)

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services, Inc.

Language: English

ASIN: B00EHA5AYU

Text-to-Speech: Enabled ☐

X-Ray: Not Enabled ☐

Lending: Enabled

Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #174,312 Paid in Kindle Store ([See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store](#))

#1 in [Kindle Store](#) > [Kindle eBooks](#) > [Gay & Lesbian](#) > **Poetry**

#13 in [Kindle Store](#) > [Kindle eBooks](#) > [Literature & Fiction](#) > [Poetry](#) > **Women**

#23 in [Books](#) > [Gay & Lesbian](#) > [Literature & Fiction](#) > **Poetry**

Would you like to [give feedback on images](#) or [tell us about a lower price?](#)

Success!

...Ew!

- I had become what I beheld: secretive
- I couldn't share it
- Others couldn't see it

Good advice is hard to come by when it's hard to ask for.

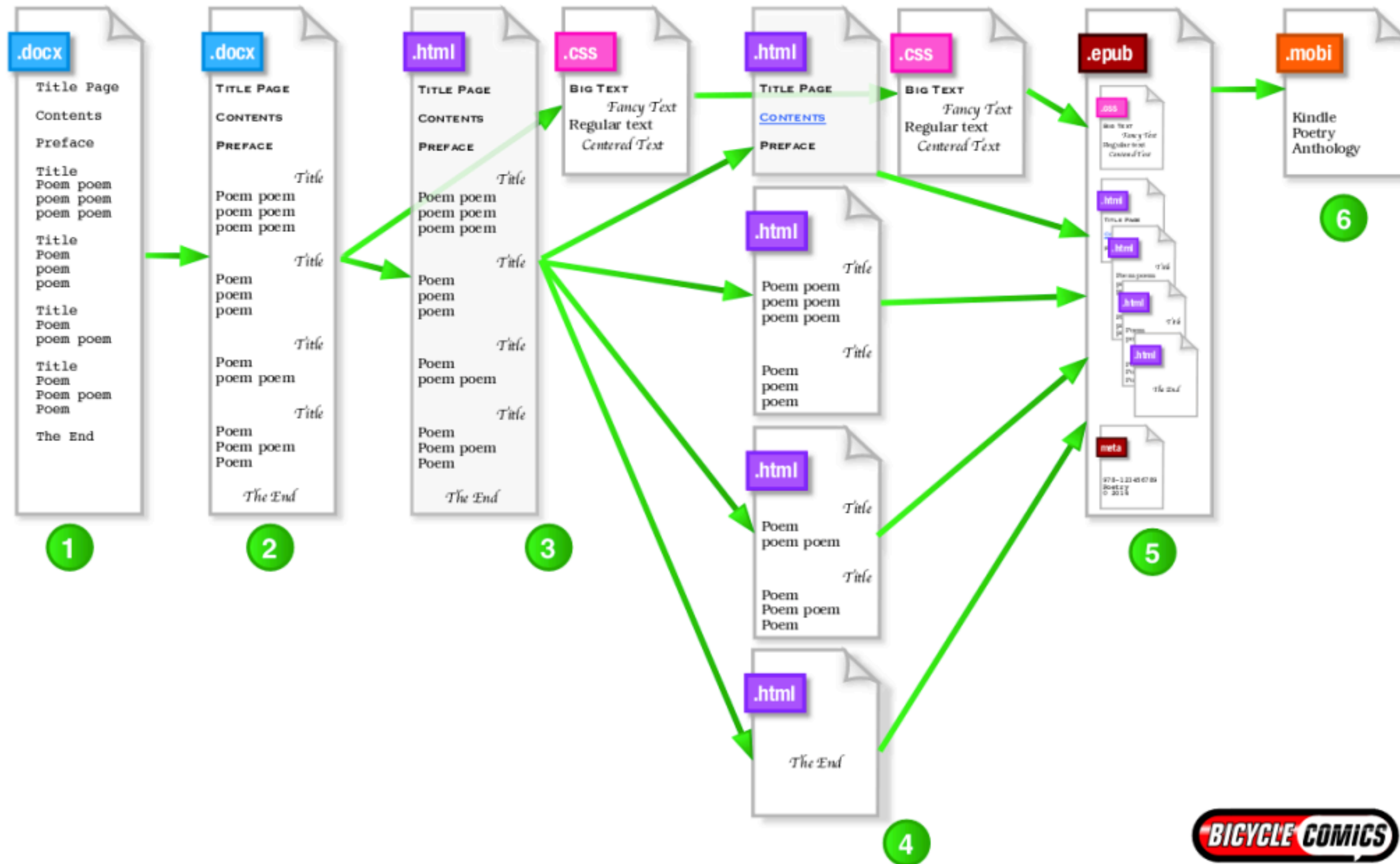
- Much like fine art books, each page of a poetry E-book may represent a complete, copyrighted work, making sampling hard.
- Many layout discussions get derailed by the text.
- Poetry titles have low margins, so some publishers don't put resources into best practices.

**4. Our (somewhat
unsatisfactory, but
hey) solutions.**

And why Yellow Buick, anyway?

The Yellow Buick Review is a fake poetry anthology solving real formatting problems.

- Lorem ipsum text keeps the focus on formatting and obviates copyright concerns
- Open-source HTML/CSS under Creative Commons Attribution License
- Step-by-step blog posts aimed at small presses



I don't claim to have **solved** the problems of poetry formatting. But at least I've **systematically** addressed them.

- Line breaks and stanza breaks, hanging indents
- mobi7, KF8, and EPUB support
- Looks okay on all major Web browsers
- Code validates at W3C (validator.w3.org)

Poem Sample

“A Winter Day”

by Lucy Maud Montgomery

I.

The air is silent save where stirs
A bugling breeze among the firs;
The virgin world in white array
Waits for the bridegroom kiss of day;
All heaven blooms rarely in the east
Where skies are silvery and fleeced,
And o'er the orient hills made glad
The morning comes in wonder clad;
Oh, 'tis a time most fit to see
How beautiful the dawn can be!

<h3>I</h3>

<p>

The air is silent save where stirs

A bugling breeze among the firs;

The virgin world in white array

Waits for the bridegroom kiss of day;

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</p>

<h3>I</h3>

<p>The air is silent save where stirs </p>

<p>A bugling breeze among the firs; </p>

<p>The virgin world in white array </p>

<p>Waits for the bridegroom kiss of day; </p>

<p>All heaven blooms rarely in the east </p>

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<p>The morning comes in wonder clad; </p>

<p>Oh, 'tis a time most fit to see </p>

<p>How beautiful the dawn can be! </p>

<h3>I</h3>

<p class= "PoemStanza">The air is silent save
where stirs </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">A bugling breeze among the
firs; </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">The virgin world in white
array </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">Waits for the bridegroom
kiss of day; </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">All heaven blooms rarely
in the east </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">Where skies are silvery
and fleeced, </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">And o'er the orient hills
made glad </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">The morning comes in wonder
clad; </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">Oh, 'tis a time most fit to
see </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">How beautiful the dawn can
be! </p>

<h3>I</h3>

<div class= "PoemStanza" id="LMM Stanza I">

<p class= "PoemLine1">The air is silent save
where stirs </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">A bugling breeze among the
firs; </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">The virgin world in white
array </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">Waits for the bridegroom
kiss of day; </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">All heaven blooms rarely
in the east </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">Where skies are silvery

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<p class= "PoemLine">And o'er the orient hills
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<p class= "PoemLine">The morning comes in wonder
clad; </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">Oh, 'tis a time most fit to
see </p>

<p class= "PoemLine">How beautiful the dawn can
be! </p>

</div>

```
p.PoemLine, li.PoemLine, div.PoemLine {  
  [foo]}
```

```
p.PoemLineIndent1, li.PoemLineIndent1, div.  
PoemLineIndent1 {  
  [foo]}
```

```
p.PoemLineIndent2, li.PoemLineIndent2, div.  
PoemLineIndent2 {  
  [foo]}
```

```
p.PoemLineRightJ, li.PoemLineRightJ, div.  
PoemLineRightJ {  
[foo]}
```

```
p.PoemLineCenter, li.PoemLineCenter, div.  
PoemLineCenter {  
[foo]}
```

Five levels of indent. How on Earth will that ever be enough?



The Paradox of Choice:

You don't mind limited choices so long as you don't know what you are missing.

Three appetizers, four mains, two desserts...



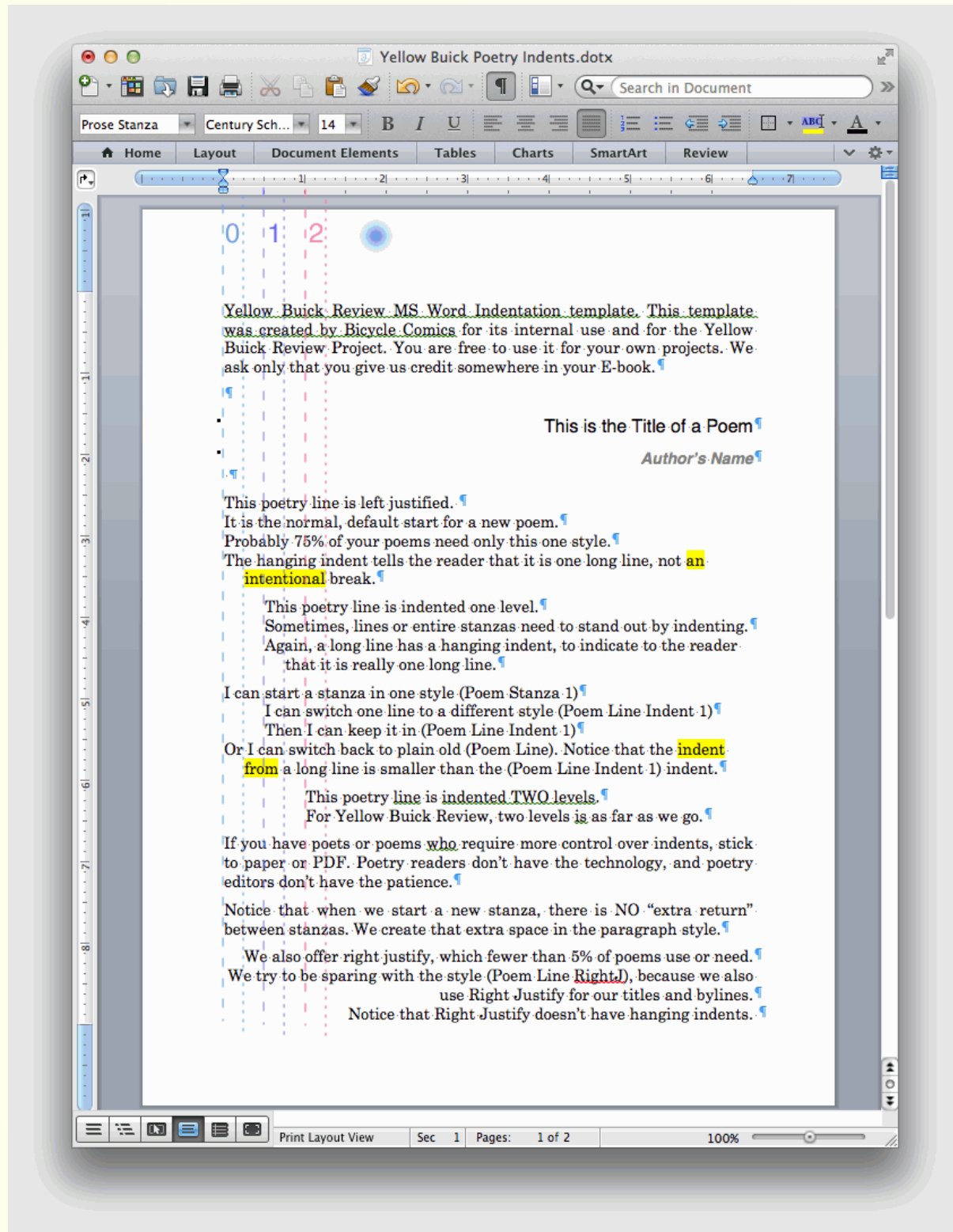
The Paradox of Choice:

You don't mind limited choices so long as you don't know what you are missing.

Three appetizers, four mains, two desserts...zero complaints.

Art thrives under limitations! Proof?

- 140 syllables in a sonnet
- 88 keys on a piano
- 26 letters in the alphabet
- 5 levels of CSS indent





Presentation is key

Any waiter knows this skill:



Presentation is key

Any waiter knows this skill:

FAIL: “I’m sorry, we’re out of
bleu cheese; would you like
French or vinaigrette?”



Presentation is key

Any waiter knows this skill:

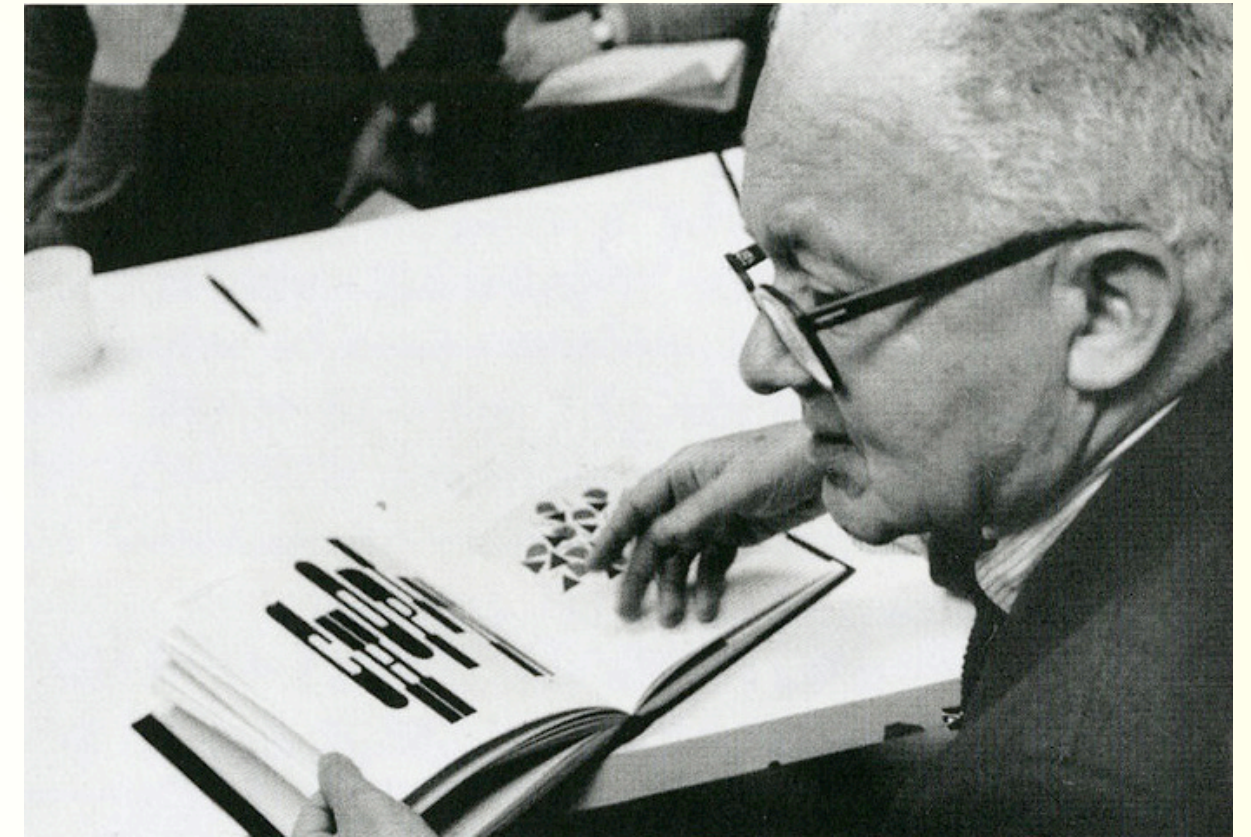
FAIL: “I’m sorry, we’re out of
bleu cheese; would you like
French or vinaigrette?”

WIN: “We offer a choice of
dressings; would you like
French or vinaigrette?”

5. Why it matters and what comes next.

“To design is much more than simply to assemble, to order, or even to edit; it is to add value and meaning, to illuminate, to simplify, to clarify....To design is to transform prose into poetry.”

–Paul Rand



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